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THE FOLKSONG IN MUSIC STUDY.

THERE is perhaps no field in the great realm of music which offers to the student more fascinating material for research than does the folksong. Springing from the very heart of the people, it is as truly and vividly expressive of race-character and race-history as are those myths which it so often clothes. The life of a people, its struggles and victories, its loves and hates, its joys and sorrows, is as securely preserved for us in its songs as is the fly in amber; for not only do we find the mass of the songs of every country devoted to its wars, its loves, and its drinking-bouts, but the labors of the people, their festivals and dances, as well as their myths and legends, claim place in these simple lyrics.

Chief among the charms of the folksong is its power to express race-characteristics. The Italian melody is always suave and graceful; the Russian has all the rudeness and pathos of the people from whom it springs; and even the indiscriminating hearer can readily distinguish between French and Scandinavian gaiety. No Tschaikowsky, no Grieg or Chopin, ever made us feel more keenly the wild sadness or the romantic fervor of his race than does the humble bard whose name even is lost to us.

These simple tunes, often of the greatest beauty, are the chosen material of the masters in music. The Scotch songs arranged by Beethoven; Schuman's "Two Grenadiers," with its great climax of the "Marseillaise;" the dramatic struggle of the French and Russian airs in Tschaikowsky's overture "1812;" Richard Strauss's Italian suite, with its humorous and charming use of the Neapolitan street-song, "Finculi, finicula;" and, most modern of all, Humperdinck's delightful opera, "Hänsel and Gretel"—are familiar illustrations which show with what delight the great musician spends the richness of his art in setting these homely jewels.

Nor is the more modern musician's use of the folksong for the sake of its local coloring and the race-characteristics which

it expresses the most important of its functions. All more elaborate melodic forms may be said to be developments of this archaic type of tune, and both *Lied* and *aria* are its legitimate descendants. Furthermore, the symphonies of Haydn, Schubert, and Brahms contain many melodies which are either folksongs pure and simple or developments of these.

Much church music, even of the better and purer kind, is also indebted largely to the folksong. The music heard in most Protestant churches is too often direct adaptation from secular sources. The opera, the sentimental song, and the folksong have all been laid under contribution to such a degree that the average choir singer regards any tune joined to any hymn suitable to church service.

But the older churches—and especially those whose liturgical forms have given opportunity to the musician of taste and judgment, until finally a school of dignified and worthy music has grown up to be their ornament—have fostered the less formal religious songs of the people. The Lutheran church, which boasts a Bach and Mendelssohn, is not wanting in sacred folksongs, while the Catholic church, with all its great composers of masses, is most rich in these fine old traditional tunes. The Regensburg Cecilian movement, which has restored to familiar use the beautiful early music of the church, the Gregorian plain-song, and the masses of Palestrina and his contemporaries, has also encouraged the singing of these venerable melodies, which one generation has handed down to the next for centuries.

The naïve character of the folksong, its simplicity and directness, as well as the fact that it is the source from which so much of the best music is drawn, would seem to point to it as a proper and natural material for the teaching of singing to children.

An examination of the school music books of Germany, France, England, and the Scandinavian countries shows the universal recognition of this fact. The pedagogues who are responsible for most of the compilations of school music in use in America have to some extent followed the lead of their brethren overseas. Of late, however, there seems a growing inclination to abandon the folksong and have recourse to the more sophis-

ticated forms of music. This is doubtless natural enough. We are not a naïve people, and the naïveté of the folksong appeals to us perhaps less than it does to another race. Certainly it would be impossible to find in any other country school music books composed by one person from cover to cover, and such books may be found here in very extensive use.

Our own lack of musical background is probably responsible for this. The statement that Americans have no folksongs is not more true than the statement that Americans have no distinct racial characteristics. We are too conglomerate and too young for either, and we have therefore no national art. We are talented and clever, but as yet entirely imitative.

These seem to me excellent reasons for using as educational material this great mass of songs which have stood the test of time in other and older countries, where ideals are higher, and taste better, than with us.

The class of people's melodies to which belong such beautiful tunes as "Gott erhalte Franz, den Kaiser," by Haydn, the "Schwertlied," by von Weber, and "God Save the King," by Henry Carey, with which we are all familiar as "America," is, speaking from the purely musical point of view, the best. These songs are all folksongs, and are still works of art. Sung of all men in the lands where they were made, they still bear the mark of genius in their greater beauty of melody as in their greater expressiveness. And while they are a most dignified expression of the words, they still present the natural intervals, the compact form, and the simple rhythm which so well fit them for use in reading and writing of notes. At the same time, their naïve character seems most appropriate to their use with children, whose greatest charm—that of unconsciousness—so much of our education seems bent upon destroying.

I would not be understood as debarring the artistic song-form from the schoolroom. On the contrary, the children's songs of Schumann, Brahms, Taubert, and Reinecke, and later the simpler works of Schubert, Haydn, Mozart, Händel, Mendelssohn, and even Beethoven, should go hand in hand with the folksong. I should insist, however, upon these appearing in their original

and pure form, and not in those garbled arrangements and adaptations so frequently published. The simpler works of the great composers preserve to us many of the qualities of the folksong, nor is that direct and childlike spirit wanting in many works of the middle class, to be found in foreign music.

This is unfortunately not the case with the bulk of music produced by American composers. Here we find aspiration to a more highly developed art-form, but an undisguised consciousness of this form; or we find the simplicity of notation without simplicity of spirit. The composer seems too frequently to be asking his listeners, "Isn't this pretty?" or, "Isn't this pathetic?" or, worse still, "Isn't this cute?" The "cute" song seems to me the bane of American music.

The average teacher of music, while he recognizes certain of their advantages as material for his work, fails often to appreciate the real charm of folksongs, which is the greatest charm of all music; that is, its expressiveness. We see this in the deplorable practice, so common among schoolbook makers, of adapting any convenient words to these familiar tunes, regardless of the real meaning and significance of the words and music.

There is no denying that certain adaptations may be justified. Many foreign texts are untranslatable; many others are not worth translating, either because their content is foolish, or because it means nothing to an American child. Also, it is quite possible to find an English poem which fits the music more successfully than a translation can. This sort of adaptation, however, calls for taste and time and skill, which are not always to be relied upon in the adapter. Indeed, there is no "job" for which the 'prentice hand feels himself more fitted, and which he undertakes more complacently, than this most delicate and difficult one.

Hence such atrocities as the following: Schumann's plaint of the *Zigeunerbub*' condemned to death has a simple, beautiful tune, but its text is properly thought inappropriate to the school-room. So the gypsy about to be hanged becomes, in the twinkling of an eye, a whistling plowboy, and nobody's feelings are hurt. Besides, praise be to the fine arts! we have a Schumann song.

Or here is the *Lohengrin* Wedding March. It is both beautiful and popular, but the original words are too sentimental for school use. Good! We make it forthwith into a patriotic song, with all its melting numbers, glorifying the "flag of the free."

Many an adapter, however, who would stop short of such deeds of violence to works of art would regard the folksong with less reverence.

Even the Germans, whose musical taste and knowledge are so much above our own, appear to regard many of their melodies as neutral in character.

But it seems to me that, if a tune has real beauty, it is because it expresses some emotion, some thought. Certainly, if the tune gives the impression of melancholy with one set of words, it cannot be expected to express joy with another set. This disregard of the quality of its expressiveness seems to me the greatest misuse of the folksong. I believe that only the teacher who studies it in its original form can make the best use of the folksong. When this is impossible, as in the case of some very old tunes, the quality of the tune should be most carefully considered before adapting it. A melody should not be used as a peg upon which to hang verses of possible meter, or its beauty will vanish.

I recall being taught as a small child a song about a duck who took her family of chickens to swim in the brook. An occasional refrain of "cluck! cluck!" was supposed to add piquancy to this ditty, but I remember to have still thought it a very stupid song. Years after, I came upon the tune with its original German words. This time it was a pretty tale of three knights who ride away to the wars, calling to their fair ladies as they pass through the gateway, "Ade! Ade!" It is considered a charming song, but, no matter how often I hear it, the "Ade" is never "Ade," but always "Cluck! cluck!"

There are, of course, many folksongs whose claim to beauty is very slender. Many of the German folksongs seem to me commonplace and uninteresting, but the large proportion has a certain plainness and lack of pretentiousness which entitle them to respect. There is also a large class of these melodies which are not suited to the wants of children, and, while they are naïve and

ALL THE BIRDS HAVE COME AGAIN.

Allegretto.

German Folksong.



{ All the birds have come a - gain, Come with joy - ous sing - ing; }
 { Thro' the mead - ow and the wood Hear their voic - es ring - ing; }



Rob - in, bluebird, thrush, and all— Lis - ten to their mer - ry call;



Pleasant springtime's hap - py days Joy and life are bring - ing.

THE DAIRY MAIDS.¹

Words Adapted.

Traditional Tune.

Andantino.

Old English.



1. Eve - ning light on the pas - ture lands, twink - ling, twink - ling;
2. Cow bells ring - ing a sleep - y chime, tink - ling, tink - ling,



Down we go with our pails in hand, Ma - ry, Mol - ly, and I....

As we call o'er the mead - ow - thyme, Ma - ry, Mol - ly, and I....

SUR LE PONT D'AVIGNON.



Sur le pont d'Av - ig - non L'on y dans - e L'on y dans - e,



Sur le pont d'Av - ig - non Tout le monde y danse en ronde

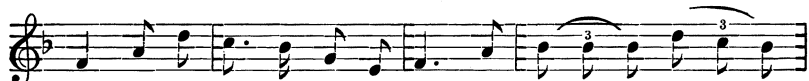


Les pay sans font comme ça Et puis en - core comme ça.

¹ From *Modern Music Series*, Silver, Burdette & Co.

JUTLAND DANCING SONG.¹*Allegro.*

Good eve-ning! good eve-ning! ye mer-ry danc-ers all! Good evening! good



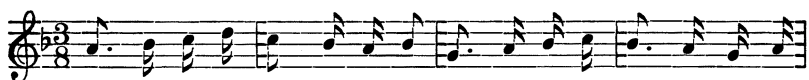
eve-ning! ye peo - ple great and small. Ye dames and ye mas-ters, ye



young men and maid-ens, To mirth and to danc-ing my fid - dle doth call. Good



eve - ning! good eve - ning! ye mer - ry danc - ers all.



Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la la la



Tra la la la la la la la Tra la la la la la.

DO-DO.²

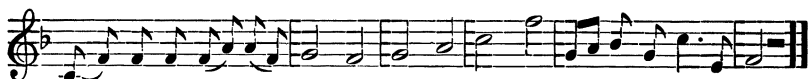
Spanish Lullaby.



Little shoes are sold at the doorway of heaven, And to all the tattered little



an - gels are giv - en; Slumber, my dar - ling, slum-ber, my dar - ling,



Slum-ber, my dar-ling ba - by. Do - do, do - do, A - ve Ma-ria, do-do.

¹ HEINRICH REIMANN, *Internationale Volkslieder*.² STURGIS AND BLACE, *Songs of the Pyrénées*. Boston: A. P. Schmidt.

RUSSIAN BOAT-SONG.¹

direct, express the thoughts and feelings of grown people. Still there are many which have always been sung by children and by generations of children, some of them in many different countries and tongues.

Among these I know none whose permanence seems more the result of beauty, charm, and a childlike unconsciousness than the German "Alle Vögel sind schon da," the French "Sur le pont d'Avignon," and the old English "Dairy Maids," which I print herewith. To these I have added three others which are less simple, though not less beautiful.

The Russian boat song, indeed, seems to me one of the most beautiful airs I know, and I wish I had been able to find a fitting translation for this most rare melody. Professor Bücher in his able *Arbeit und Rythmus* gives this as one of many examples of songs whose origin was undoubtedly the rhythmic motion suggested by the workman's occupation—in this case the measured dip and pull of the rower's oars.

With such material as this to choose from, one cannot but feel sure that the coming adapter and translator will be able to add much that is valuable to American school music.

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¹ KARL BÜCHER, *Arbeit und Rythmus*, Leipzig.